

Marines celebrate birthday any clime, place

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From the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli, we will celebrate the Marine Corps birthday in the air, on land and sea.

Since 1921 the Marine Corps birthday has been officially celebrated all over the world on Nov. 10.

Throughout the years, the Marine Corps birthday has been celebrated in a variety of ways, depending on the location and circumstances of the Marine units. Marines deploy constantly, causing them to commemorate the Corps birthday on a ship, in a foreign country or during combat.

“On the eagle, globe and anchor, the globe represents that the Marine Corps is all over the world,” said Sgt. Maj. Michael D. Swanberg, squadron sergeant major, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251. “Which means that no matter where you are, you can celebrate the Corp’s birthday.”

Traditionally the Marine Corps birthday is celebrated with a ball, in which Marines come together to participate in the customs and traditions passed down from generation to generation.

“It’s comforting to know that there were so many Marines that did this before me,” Swanberg said. “It’s great to carry on the customs and traditions.”

One of the customs during the ball is when junior and senior Marines come together and share stories of the Corps’ past and future.

“The best part of the ball is being with all your fellow Marines to reminisce,” said Cpl. Helen Larry, aviation electrician, VMFA-122. “I like when the older Marines come and share some of their great stories.”

Dress Blues, birthday cake, and the reading of General John A. Lejune’s birthday message are hallmarks of a traditional ball, but not in all cases. The Marine Corps’ reputation as a force in readiness leads to many deployments, which means Marines fight and celebrate in every clime and place.

“I’ve celebrated the Marine Corps birthday in Japan, Peru, Paraguay and many more places outside the United States,” Swanberg said. “I have celebrated 24 birthdays throughout my career. My most memorable one was during Operation Desert Storm. It was an honor to celebrate our birthday prior to going into harms way.”

Young Marines who have not entered the “fleet” may still be in their military occupational specialty schools. However they are still able to participate in Marine Corps birthday traditions. Many schools host their own balls for the students, hold a cake cutting ceremony and read the birthday message.

As the first line of defense, Marines are usually in a combat situation, according to Chief Warrant Officer Aaron Sarbacker, quality assurance officer in charge, Installation Personnel Administration Center.

“I celebrated the Marine Corps birthday during Operation Desert Shield,” Sarbacker said. “Although we were in the sand and under tents, we still cut the birthday cake, read the birthday message and the commandant’s message. I feel fortunate to be able to celebrate our birthday in that type of situation.”

The Marine Corps birthday does not have to consist of a special ceremony to be memorable, according to Sarbacker.

“I realized who (Marines) are because of the places we’ve been,” Sarbacker said. “It be came more apparent while celebrating our birthday in Operation Desert Storm. The birthday takes on a whole new meaning.

Celebrating the ball overseas is not that different from the United States, according to Sgt. Vernon Kemp, operations chief, VMFA-122.

“I was in Iwakuni, Japan when I celebrated my second birthday,” Kemp said. “It was no different from being in the states, except for the fact that we weren’t home. No matter where you are, the ball is a great experience. I am glad to celebrate (the Marine Corps birthday) no matter where I’m at.”

Although Marines enjoy the ball anywhere, they prefer to celebrate it at home with their families, according to Kemp. It can be an opportunity to allow family members to experience the Marine Corps traditions.

“There is no big difference between celebrating the ball in the United States or overseas,” Swanberg said. “But, while in the United States, the ability to share the birthday with my family adds a lot more pleasure.”

All Marines are encouraged to attend the Marine Corps ball honoring 228 years of honest and faithful war fighting, according to Swanberg.

“I think for Marines it is important attend the ball, in order to carry on the torch for the generations of Marines to come.”